

THURSDAY, MAY 18, 1911.

THE NORTH POLE.

The North Pole. By Robert E. Peary. With an introduction by Theodore Roosevelt. Pp. xii+326. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910.) Price 25s. net.

PEARY'S narrative of the journey by which he reached the North Pole and satisfied his life's ambition cannot fail to command the respect of all who appreciate indomitable perseverance, high courage, and unfaltering devotion to an ideal. Peary cheerfully accepted months of drudgery, for although he describes life on the march in the Arctic as a dog's life, he regards the work as a man's work; and although he met with repeated disappointment—for beating the northern record without reaching the pole he despises as an empty bauble—his devotion was at length rewarded by well-earned success. Peary's last journey will probably always be his most famous, for it accomplished one of the greatest geographical quests; but its results are probably of less real geographical value than his exploration of northern Greenland, one of the most important of Arctic achievements.

Peary's book on the whole is disappointing. Its form at once arouses the prejudice of those who do not buy books by bulk. It is unnecessarily large, its size is increased by some illustrations which are neither instructive nor ornamental, and by the use of vast margins to the pages. The book is issued regardless of the congested conditions of most people's bookshelves, and is apparently intended for those who can find space for works with a large proportion of blank paper. The book has obviously been prepared in haste; the illustrations are in no particular order, and their titles cannot have been corrected by the author. Thus the view of the stone cairn, entitled "Camp Morris K. Jessup," that is, the camp at the North Pole, should be "Cape Morris K. Jessup," a mistake which might give rise to a serious misunderstanding. There is a map, inconveniently large, from which Crocker Land, one of Peary's most suggestive discoveries, has been omitted.

The book has no particular literary charm, although it is occasionally enlivened by touches of American humour, such as the statement that the atmosphere in Eskimo huts can be handled with a shovel.

The most interesting part of the book is the description of the Eskimo whose Mongolian affinities Admiral Peary clearly recognises. The account shows the author's tendency to judge everything by Arctic standards. Thus because the fair-skinned Eskimo were not as much impressed by white men as were some dark races, Peary dismisses with scorn the idea that any aborigines regarded the first Europeans they saw as superhuman. "Much nonsense," he says (p. 53), "has been told by travellers in remote lands about the aborigines regarding as gods the white men

who come to them, but I have never placed much credence in these stories."

The book tells in detail the story of the expedition and its equipment; but in spite of the space available there are many omissions of the very things one would most like to know. Thus Peary claims that the success of his dash to the pole was only possible owing to the new sledges and portable stove that he designed for the expedition. He does not give future travellers the benefit of any descriptions of these instruments and their novel features. There is also little in this book to answer the criticism of those who have questioned Peary's actual attainment of the pole. There is an appendix by Mr. Henry Gannett, Admiral Chester, and Mr. O. H. Tittman, who state that they have examined Peary's journal and records, and they are unanimously of the opinion that he reached the pole. Some adequate statement of the evidence that was laid before these distinguished authorities might have been given as one of the appendices, of which there are three. There is no reason to distrust the fact that Peary reached the pole, or sufficiently near it for any practical purpose. The great increase in his pace after he parted from Captain Bartlett is not explained in the text, but the photographs of the area round the pole show wide stretches of smooth ice, hence exceptionally easy ice conditions may account for the speed of the final marches.

It is not easy to follow the story of the last few days of the approach to the pole, especially as the continuous daylight renders his references to morning and evening less helpful than they would be in following an ordinary itinerary. A tabular statement of his marches would have been very useful. The numerous references to the observations taken and the facsimiles of some of the calculations are not convincing, especially as a curious statement on p. 241 suggests that Peary has only a rule of thumb acquaintance with astronomical methods. He remarks that he had to strain every nerve to arrive at the pole by noon, so that he could at once take an observation for latitude; but at the pole the sun would be moving round at nearly a constant altitude, so that any time would have served for the observations, and time would not enter into the computation.

The author gives an interesting description of the arduous voyage up and down Kennedy Channel. He tells us that only four ships have made this dangerous passage, and of these one was lost and two were badly damaged. Peary's experiences show that Sir George Nares's successful navigation of this channel in the *Alert* is a feat which has not received the credit it deserves.

The most interesting geographical contribution in the book is the discussion by Mr. R. A. Harris, of the United States Coast Survey, of the bathymetric and tidal observations. The soundings taken show that a continental shelf covered by 100 fathoms of water extends for forty-six miles north of Grant Land. From the edge of this shelf, the sea deepens rapidly to 825 fathoms, but it then becomes shallower again to the north, and the depth lessens to 310

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fathoms; the sea deepens again, and Peary's soundings found no bottom at 1500 fathoms. The existence of this shallow ridge has an important bearing on the possible existence of land further to the west. This question is discussed by Mr. Harris, and he concludes from the tidal evidence, and the fact that the flood at Point Barrow comes from the west and not from the north, that there must be a wide area of land or of island strewn sea to the west of the Arctic Archipelago. He estimates that there is an area of nearly half a million square miles either of land, of islands, or of shoals still undiscovered in the Arctic Ocean to the north of the western part of North America and of eastern Asia. Mr. Harris suggests that this land must extend from north of Bennett Land, which is to the north of Siberia, eastward to Crocker Land, and with Peary's attainment of the pole the settlement of this problem is the most interesting geographical question left in the Arctic Ocean.

ENERGY AND THE ORGANISM.

Vicious Circles in Disease. By Dr. J. B. Hurry. Pp. xiv + 186. (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1911.) Price 6s. net.

A FEW days before this volume was placed in the hands of the reviewer he had been watching for a few minutes the race of a small brook into a larger but more sluggish stream. Curiously near the inrush a wisp of straws lay almost at rest, circling slowly round and round, but not swept with other wisps and leaves into the main current. This arrest was due to a still but deep whirlpool formed by the different velocities of the waters at the angle of meeting. Light objects which skirted this eddy swiftly vanished on their way to the sea; those caught in it were imprisoned. However, by placing a walking stick tangentially to the eddy, now one straw, now another, would dart aside, and, catching a streak of the main current, would speed off into liberty.

This humble little parable may serve to illustrate Dr. Hurry's interesting volume on vicious circles of disease. The author's message may be summed up thus: In health the confluent or congruent streams of energy should work in reciprocal harmony for the several ends of the organism as a whole; but in disorder this agent or that, alien or home-grown, may strike tangentially upon one or more of such streams and form a vortex, twisting the lines of function and setting up, in one or more situations, a focus of wasting energy, and, it may be, a trap for alien or degraded products which should be run out of the system. Now at some point in this circle the gyrating lines may be cut, the eddy may be diverted, and the lines of energy released to their normal directions. The hound which had turned to hunting its own tail may be put again on the track.

Among the absurd axioms which we are apt to repeat without thought is that which unconditionally impugns the practical impulse to "treat symptoms"; but in the majority of cases—in all for which we have no specific antidote—no other course is open to the

practitioner. Moreover, even where we have such a specific, to refrain from treating symptoms, if the physician's, is not the patient's point of view. He asks for cure; but also for relief. Now these observations and maxims of Dr. Hurry emphasise a further truth—that in so doing we may be cutting across—at any point, it matters not where—a "vicious circle." To disperse a vortex, expending energy in mere friction, may serve even to disperse the malady; at least it may moderate its intensity, or dispel vexatious symptoms. But often the whole trouble consists in such a vortex, and in a single one; in these cases, therefore, of which the author gives many an instructive instance, to treat a symptom is to cure a disease; for the conception of disease as an "entity" ought to be banished even from the language of the modern physician. Sometimes it is the knife which must take the place of the walking stick of the parable; but happily milder means often suffice to divert the currents into the normal channels, but not, as Dr. Hurry inadvertently says (p. 167), to "reverse" the circular movement. This cannot happen—or, more accurately, never does. Evolution never returns by the way it came.

There is one more demur. Dr. Hurry seems scarcely to realise, or fully to impress upon us, the factor of "organic memory" in these phases of function, the bent of biological matter to repeat what it has done before; a faculty on which development and purpose depend. In vicious circles every gyration deepens the groove, an abnormal habit is formed, so that arrest of such a local waste of energy and such a distress becomes more and more difficult; herein enters the problem of "faith healing," of the stronger tangential force which is to dissipate the vortex and redistribute the currents of energy. The longer the "habit"—the fixture of organic memory—the harder the impulse needed to "break the circle," for the habit has become independent of the original cause, which indeed had often vanished.

Dr. Hurry does not pretend for a moment to have discovered this notion of vicious circles, but he has made it his own; it is one often remarked upon by medical practitioners, but no one has presented the subject systematically to us before in a printed book. But both in lectures and practice I remember that the Teales, of Leeds—especially Mr. Pridgin Teale—taught the principle emphatically, and, if they did not publish the experience, put it variously into practice. And so it has been, no doubt, with many another physician; but of this the author is well aware, while he has himself the merit of perceiving the need of a systematic study of the problem, of adapting the principle with much ingenuity to explain many morbid conditions, and of illustrating the practice by interesting examples. Out of his careful clinical studies and large experience Dr. Hurry is justified in pointing to the great array of evidence which he has brought forward in his chapters on the systems of the body, and formulated in diagram, and in declaring that this aspect of medicine "is one which no practitioner of the *ars medendi* can afford to neglect."

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